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ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
SCHOOL COMMITTEE
OF THE
TOWN OF MONTAGUE,
1886-87.

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TURNERS FALLS, MASS. :
CECIL T. BAGNALL, PROPRIETOR OF REPORTER.
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SCHOOL REPORT OF MONTAGUE

For the Year 1886-7.

A condensed form of the material condition of our public schools may be shown in the following financial and numerical statements which have been obtained by actual computations and careful estimates. It may be of interest and utility now, and of value in the archives for future reference.

Whole number legal age,	1,350
Different children enrolled,	1,043
Average daily attendance in all public schools,	886
No. days taught,	180
Average No. to each teacher.	38.3
No. of teachers in all public schools,	28
No. of teachers in public high schools,	4
Pupils,	73
No. school buildings,	11
No. sittings for study,	1400
Estimated value of school property used,	\$70,000
Average expense per capita for instruction,	\$10.25 15 ⁰⁰

TAXABLE PROPERTY OF THE TOWN.

Property estimated,	\$3,500,000
Assessed,	\$2,889,181
Of all money raised for town expenses, appropriated for schools,	28 per cent.

The foregoing shows in part the magnitude of the school affairs of which we have been the direct custodians for the year past. It is obvious that the office is not a sinecure, not void of anxiety and responsibility. Though it may be deplorably and painfully apparent that the world's immense material growth and development, its enterprises, industries, inventions

and all the gigantic schemes so engross the attention of men, that in comparison school interests may seem insignificant and performing its duties appear like small business, yet it is encouraging that it must be confessed that wherever material growth is the most rapid and luxuriant a munificence toward the public school has developed itself as displayed in furnishing means and facilities for their advancement, corresponding in no inconsiderable degree to the opulence of the great monopolies. A couple of observations from extreme sources may together be illustrative of the growth of the sentiment of liberality for public education.

I. "Yes, our district schools cost altogether too much," remarked a man from a certain part of the town one day last week, whereupon he drew a 40 cent plug of tobacco from his pocket preparatory to taking a smoke.—*Woodstock, (Vt.) Standard.*

If such an opinion was ever entertained in this vicinity it is a delightful assurance that it has been gloriously outgrown. Thanks to all that public spirit and material progress have done to nurture to the growth!

II. No people are fit to be free, or will long stain their freedom, without that enlightened patriotism which is alone the result of education. Never forget that the *school house* is as much an arsenal for the maintenance of our institutions and liberties as Old Point Comfort, Fort Moultrie or even Sumpter. We are poor, indeed, but we are not too poor to provide for the education of our children.—*Gen. McGowan.*

The evident disposition and desire of our citizens to provide all the funds for public school purposes that is needed, is an evidence, that though some to-be-forgotten past, ministered sparingly, reluctantly, or begrudgingly to the necessities of public education, our people have arrived to an eminence of belief, in accord with the latter quotation, the flavor of which perhaps might have directed us to seek for its source in New England, rather than in South Carolina.

And only for the generous sums appropriated and the consistent and friendly attitude of the inhabitants toward our plans, the committees of the past few years could not have established the present system of schools, which will compare favorably with that of any town in Western Massachusetts, of no more advantageous conditions than ours.

Yet they are susceptible of continual improvements and reforms, and it may in some way, or to some extent, facilitate some of the more obvious needed improvements to offer some comments and suggestions.

ATTENDANCE.

Of the first importance, yet the hardest to secure. The limitation of the compulsory law, the need, real or imaginary, of the services or wages of children elsewhere, and an inadequate comprehension on part of parent and pupil, of the irrevocable losses entailed by irregular attendance, the dejection it causes teachers and the disturbance it works with the classes. This may all seem hackneyed; yet when a pupil is put back, or fails of regular promotion, the parent and pupil are often dissatisfied: complain of partiality and injustice, when 75 per cent of the cause of this inability to pass, may be traced to long absences and irregular attendance. Because we believe 75 per cent of the evil is unnecessary, or, might be overcome, the subject is introduced and its correction urged so often in the annual reports.

TEACHERS.

The committee not only from theory, but observation and experience, believe in Normal teachers, or those trained by the Normal systems, and have employed such as far as practicable, and have been well satisfied with their ability and work. It is not very uncommon to receive letters from superintendents from

large towns in the eastern part of the State enquiring of the ability and skill of some teacher in our schools; and with a favorable answer from us, and such other recommendations as he may have obtained, and perhaps a personal visit in the school, he does not scruple to offer the teacher more salary than she is getting, and other inducements, which make it for her interest to ask to be released from her present engagement. We have in some cases yielded to their importunities. It is unwise to do so, as a rule, we think. For these reasons:

1st. It is generally an unfavorable time to secure good teachers in the middle of the year or term.

2nd. It is not always the teachers whom we can spare the best who are called for.

3d. Even if the successor obtained, has as much or even more ability than the predecessor, the school suffers the embarrassment of an interruption—having to work by new ways—the teacher unavoidably loses time in reorganizing and familiarizing herself with the work and become acquainted with the pupils. We have passed no “tenure of office bill” but consider that *in honor* they are held for the school year which they are upon, and that “candidating” or negotiating with Teachers’ Agencies, ready to go at their call, is hardly a course which has our approval. When we have a first-class teacher, one whom we are justly proud of, it may become necessary as protection against intrusion to placard upon their school room door the notice “Superintendents from larger and wealthier towns are requested not to trespass on these premises.” These intrusions may be interpreted as complimentary to the good fortune or good judgment exercised in selecting the teachers, as well as that our schools afford a good field to develop their skill and diffuse their fame. We are glad to have had some benefit of those who are worthy to be called to “go up higher,” and it is gratifying to feel assured that our school work and system, and salaries, are of such a character as to make it possible to secure first-class teachers and to retain their valuable services so long.

STIMULANTS AND NARCOTICS.

It may be material to allude in some way to the recent enactment concerning the duty of teachers to teach the effects of stimulants and narcotics. To what grades does the requirement apply? has been asked. Since the law does not designate, it is natural to infer, all grades. An intimation that such teaching may not augment the interest of their traffic has been made, hence may be objectionable, will hardly hold, for the law precludes no instruction or illustration tending to demonstrate their beneficent and salutary results and consequences. For non-compliance with the law there are impending penalties.

The following law was enacted by the Legislature of 1885 :

“ Physiology and hygiene, which, in both divisions of the subject, shall include special instruction as to the effects of alcoholic drinks, stimulants and narcotics on the human system, shall be taught as a regular branch of study to all pupils in all schools supported wholly or in part by public money, except special schools maintained solely for instruction in particular branches, such as drawing, mechanics, art, and like studies. All acts, or parts of acts relating to the qualifications of teachers in the public schools shall apply to the branch of study prescribed in this act.” Acts of 1885, Chapter 332.

TURNERS FALLS HIGH SCHOOL.

It will be remembered that three years ago, at the annual town meeting an urgent request was made for a higher grade of school at Turners Falls than had been maintained, and an appropriation was made for fitting up apartments for this purpose. The School Board for that year, consisting of Messrs. Dana, Madden and Bowker, found, as was insisted by those who had been familiar with the conditions, that the number of advanced pupils to attend was insufficient to make a respectable high school. The money then appropriated was used with the general school appropriation for their support.

This year it was seen that with a promotion from the city (a new experiment), the few who attend from Riverside and an

increased local promotion, the number was sufficient, and the necessity for additional room had matured.

Hence, we ventured, without other than former instructions and expressed wishes of the town, to fit up rooms for assistant's recitation, a laboratory, to hire an assistant teacher and buy extra books, at a cost in all of about \$500.

The school now seems to be qualified to give a complete academic course.

VOCAL MUSIC.

How much money the town can afford to appropriate, or how well the town can afford not to furnish some means for scientific instruction in vocal music, the committee feel incompetent to decide. It cannot be taught universally and uniformly by our regular teachers. We expended a little in this direction as an experiment the past year. Those who have been the direct patrons and are competent to judge of the results, we hope will give us the benefit of their observations. It is true that towns of no greater capacity than ours employ a musical professor, who devotes his entire attention to instruction in this branch of education. An appropriation of four or five hundred dollars, might, perhaps, be devoted to this purpose profitably. We hope some attention may be paid to these suggestions, that intelligent action may be taken.

APPROPRIATIONS.

The date earlier than former years (February 5th), adopted for closing the town accounts, leaves the teachers' wages for the three last weeks of the winter term unpaid. In determining the amount of another year's requirements, the balance of the teachers' pay-roll, the maintenance of two additional schools, which, from present prospects, seems inevitable, and such sums as may be deemed advisable for the musical instruction already mentioned, should all be considered.

We rejoice to observe that amid all the turmoil and commotion and uncertainty in the business world, the more than two centuries old school system never moved steadier or with less friction than to-day. With such an infinite variety of relations, necessities, interests, dependencies, its existence is almost a marvel. Teachers clothed with almost despotic authority over so many different families of children, of such disparity of dispositions and training, parents compelled to send their children, the reluctant as well as the willing—a quarter of all taxation for public expenditures applied to its support—it would almost seem that it bore upon itself the weapons for its own destruction. Yet, it is to-day the one acknowledged self evident necessity and hope of the world.

We take this occasion to express our sincere gratitude for the support we have received—there seems to be no abatement of co-operation from year to year; very few contentions that cannot be amicably adjusted; very little of unreasonable and inconsistent interference with official work and authority—all of which we trust we have duly appreciated and are not unconscious of the obligations that such public confidence and concord impose upon us.

A. V. BOWKER,	} Superintending
SEYMOUR ROCKWELL,	
L. J. MARCH,	
	} School Committe
	} of Montague.

